

**08/02/21 Monday**

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EMSC Reports Magnitude 5.8 Earthquake in Ocean South of Indonesia's Sungai Penuh  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) reported early on Tuesday morning a strong earthquake of magnitude 5.8 south of Sumatra. It was originally reported as a stronger magnitude 6.1 quake.

The quake was reported along the Sunda Megathrust or Great Sumatran Fault, a fault line off Sumatra's western coast that separates the Sunda Plate from the Australian Plate. The location was 191 kilometers southwest of the city of Sungai Penuh, near the Mentawai Islands in the Indian Ocean, at a depth of 40 kilometers.

The same fault line also produced the catastrophic Boxing Day earthquake and tsunami in 2004 that killed a quarter-million people. Authorities have not issued a tsunami warning in response to the Tuesday quake.

Residents as far away as Jakarta, 288 kilometers northeast of the quake, reported feeling the shaking.

Sitting at the convergence of several tectonic plates, Indonesia is home to [numerous volcanoes](#) and often subjected to earthquakes both sundry and powerful. A day earlier, a [quake of similar strength](#) was reported hundreds of miles to the east, off the southern coast of the island of Papua New Guinea.

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US Sen. Graham Tests Positive for COVID, Says 'Flu-Like Symptoms' Would Be 'Far Worse' Without Shot  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

While the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have noted the possibility of "breakthrough" cases, they noted last week that just 6,500 such cases have occurred among 163 million fully vaccinated Americans, with 74% of those breakthrough cases occurring in Americans over the age of 65.

US Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), one of the national legislature's leading Republican lawmakers, announced Monday he had contracted COVID-19 despite being vaccinated.

"I was just informed by the House physician I have tested positive for #COVID19 even after being vaccinated. I started having flu-like symptoms Saturday night and went to the doctor this morning," Graham said in a brief statement on Twitter.

"I feel like I have a sinus infection and at present time I have mild symptoms. I will be quarantining for ten days," he noted, adding, "I am very glad I was vaccinated because without vaccination I am certain I would not feel as well as I do now. My symptoms would be far worse." The 66-year-old senator received the Pfizer vaccine in December 2020, when the first shots were being administered to senior US officials, including federal lawmakers.

"Thank God for those who produced these vaccines. If enough of us take it, we will get back to normal lives," he [tweeted at the time](#). "Help is on the way."

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) [have said](#) that new research shows that the delta variant of COVID-19, which first emerged in India and has become the dominant strain of the virus circulating in the United States and is [blamed for a worldwide](#) spike in COVID-19 cases. The Delta variant is just as transmissible as the first version of COVID-19 that spread around the world last year, and is capable of infecting people who have been fully vaccinated against the virus. However, the rate of hospitalization and death from the virus is much lower for vaccinated people than unvaccinated.

Across the US, the pace of vaccination has slackened from an April 8 high of 4.4 million doses delivered per day to just 586,000 on July 29, [according to CDC data](#), which shows that since the CDC advised Americans to resume wearing masks again last week, daily vaccinations grew, hitting their highest numbers in more than a month.

However, COVID-19 cases continue to swell, with 103,000 new cases reported on Friday - a number not broken since February 8, when the US was coming out of the worst period of the outbreak thus far. Daily deaths, which lag by several weeks, have remained low, but in areas of the US where vaccination rates remain low, [hospitalizations are reaching](#) record levels.

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With Just 12% of US Rental Aid Distributed, Tenants Fear 'Tsunami of Evictions' As Moratorium Ends

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

After a federal eviction moratorium was allowed to expire over the weekend, thousands of eviction proceedings filed by landlords are working their way through court systems across the United States. The vast majority of federal funds meant for rental assistance, which could forestall an eviction, were never even disbursed.

On July 30, a federal ban on evictions issued by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expired without being replaced, and as many as 15 million Americans behind on their rent have been exposed to the risk of being kicked out of their homes. While some states have their own separate moratoria, others are already allowing proceedings to begin their path through the court system.

In states like Michigan, Missouri, and [Rhode Island](#), eviction moratoria have already expired or never existed, and courts have already begun processing landlords' filings to have their tenants removed if they're behind on the rent. In other states, such as New York, some renters still qualify for protection if they can demonstrate economic hardship caused by the COVID-19



pandemic, but only if they file the appropriate forms with their landlord, according to the [Associated Press](#).

While many states still have their eviction protections in place, many of them will soon expire, some within the week, such as Hawaii's, which expires on August 6 - Friday.

Others, like Maryland's, will expire on August 15, and Illinois renters will be protected through the end of the month. In California and Washington, DC, the moratorium extends until October, while in New Jersey, folks have until January 2022.

Others still have more complex systems: in Oregon, for example, the state moratorium [expired on June 30](#), a month before the federal ban, but evictions specifically for rent owed during the pandemic are paused [until February 2022](#), giving renters time to pay their landlords back.

Jack Rasmus, professor in economics and politics at St. Mary's College in California, told Radio Sputnik's [The Critical Hour](#) on Monday that "this is a portion of the evictions: evictions have been going on for quite some time."

"People should realize, though, that we're talking about, immediately, 11 million people who have had the benefit of a moratorium for rents that are in some way supported, subsidized by the federal government," he told hosts Wilmer Leon and Garland Nixon. "There is an even larger number who are in rents who haven't been so supported and they've been being evicted here since the beginning of the year. So, people should realize this is not the whole picture."

"We're all very concerned about a tsunami of evictions," Joe McGuire, an attorney with the Detroit Justice Center, told [ABC local WXYZ](#) in Detroit. "A lot of people still haven't received unemployment benefits. A lot of people are having a hard time finding jobs in this economy that are good for them."

In St. Louis, 126 evictions have already been ordered, and the [Sheriff's Office told AP](#) they plan to begin enforcing them immediately, evicting as many as nine families per day beginning on Monday, August 9. Between St. Louis and Kansas City, more than 13,000 eviction cases have been filed since March 15, 2020, according to [the Eviction Lab](#) at Princeton University.

According to [the Aspen Institute](#), more than 15 million Americans are behind on their rent payments, collectively owing up to \$20 billion to their landlords. Those numbers are heavily skewed by race. "Currently, 22% of Black renters and 17% of Latinx renters are in debt to their landlords, compared to 15% overall and 11% of White renters," the DC-based nonprofit reports. "Rental debt is also challenging for renters with children, with 19% unable to make payments."

Meanwhile, a new spike in COVID-19 cases has led to the largest daily new cases in the US since February [and new records](#) for a single state being set by Florida over the weekend, which had more than 10,200 people hospitalized with the virus and saw more than 21,000 new cases on Sunday alone. According to the CDC, one in five new cases in the US is in Florida or Texas, and many of the states that lack further eviction protections, like Missouri, are also among those with the lowest [COVID-19 vaccination rates](#) and the highest numbers of new cases.

Many of those same states have also terminated their federally-funded [unemployment assistance programs](#) early as well, depriving Americans without jobs of up to \$300 a week, undoubtedly amplifying the effects of the eviction ban's sunset.

Federal Aid Undisbursed

As part of the \$900 billion CARES Act COVID-19 relief bill passed by Congress in December 2020, some \$25 billion was set aside in aid for renters, and over the next few months billions



more were added to the pot, bringing the total to \$45 billion by March 2021, with \$21 billion of that going specifically to the states.

However, of the \$25 billion in federal aid to renters, just \$3 billion has been distributed so far, with another \$1.5 billion being distributed by state and local governments by the end of June, the most recent month for which the US [Treasury has released](#) data. This, despite a [requirement in the law](#) mandating that state and local governments distribute up to 90% of the funds allotted to them for emergency renter's assistance.

Court Looks to Lawmakers, Who Look to Biden

On June 29, the US [Supreme Court ruled](#) in favor of a group of Alabama landlords who challenged the CDC's authority to ban evictions, but declined to remove the ban because it only had one month left until it expired anyway. Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who voted with the majority, wrote in a concurring opinion that if the Biden administration wanted the eviction ban to continue, it would have to be passed as a bill by Congress.

Despite this warning, the administration [waited until July 29](#) to issue a statement saying that while the White House considered extending the eviction ban "a prudent public health decision," its hands were effectively tied by the Court's decision.

"In light of the Supreme Court's ruling, the President calls on Congress to extend the eviction moratorium to protect such vulnerable renters and their families without delay," Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in the Friday statement, adding that Biden was urging several federal government departments, as well as state and local governments, to "do everything in their power" to continue to protect Americans from eviction.

That evening, the vast majority of the 435 members of the US House of Representatives left for their seven-week summer recess, which their colleagues in the Senate will begin on August 6. However, a handful of progressive lawmakers, led by freshman lawmaker [Rep. Cori Bush \(D-MO\)](#), began a protest on the US Capitol steps outside the House chamber demanding the eviction ban be reinstated.

The protest has grown to at times as many as several hundred people and drawn other progressive figures to the Capitol grounds. On Sunday evening, Revs. Dr. William J. Barber and Dr. Liz Theoharis, co-chairs of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, spoke to the protesters occupying the House steps. The progressive grassroots movement had already planned on coming to DC to demand Congress discard the filibuster blocking an important voting rights bill and several other pieces of legislation, but Barber said that a federal ban on evictions must also be added to their list of demands.

However, on Sunday, House Democrats were still looking to the White House for answers. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD), Whip James E. Clyburn (D-SC) and Assistant Speaker Katherine Clark (D-CT) [issued a statement](#) saying that "action is needed, and it must come from the Administration."

"Doing so is a moral imperative to keep people from being put out on the street which also contributes to the public health emergency," they added.

[On Monday, Biden](#), in turn, looked to the CDC to solve the problem, asking the agency to "consider once again the possibility of ... a new, 30-day eviction moratorium - focused on counties with High or Substantial case rates - to protect renters."

"To date, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky and her team have been unable to find legal authority for a new, targeted eviction moratorium. Our team is redoubling efforts to identify all



available legal authorities to provide necessary protections,” the statement reads, adding that “in the meantime, the President will continue to do everything in his power to help renters from eviction,” citing the previously stated requests of department heads, state governments, and merciful landlords

The Monday White House statement did not mention the possibility of a federal anti-eviction law or the cancellation of Congress’ summer recess.

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‘Ownership is Ours’: Sheikh Jarrah Families Refuse ‘Protected Tenants’ Deal by Israeli Supreme Court

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Protests against an Israeli court’s ruling against Palestinian Sheikh Jarrah residents in May coincided with violence elsewhere in Jerusalem during Ramadan, including the storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli police, which together helped set off 11 days of rocket bombardments by Hamas and airstrikes in Gaza by the Israeli Air Force.

On Monday, the Israeli Supreme Court postponed its ruling on an appeal to a lower court’s decision to allow four Palestinian families to be evicted [from their homes](#) in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, saying it had not sufficiently heard arguments from both sides of the case.

During the hearing, which has been anticipated for months, the court suggested the families become “protected tenants” of Nahalat Shimon, the Jewish settler organization awarded the land by a lower court.

“This compromise will give us breathing room for a good many years until either the land is properly regulated or there is peace,” Justice Yitzhak Amit told a packed courtroom in Jerusalem on Monday, according to the [Times of Israel](#).

However, the Palestinian families, together some 70 people, refused the offer.

“This means we’d have to concede ownership. This is something we definitively reject because the ownership is ours,” Alaa Salaymeh, one of the residents facing eviction, [told Middle East Eye](#) outside the courthouse after the court adjourned. “And we brought papers from Jordan that say the ownership is ours.”

Sami Ershied, a lawyer representing the Sheikh Jarrah families, [told Al Jazeera](#) that the proposal was unacceptable, but added it was “a good indication” that the judge did not reject their appeal out of hand.

“So far, we did not hear an offer that was fair enough and preserves the rights of residents. Therefore, we did not reach any compromise,” Ershied said. “We hope that the judges will continue listening to our arguments and take into consideration all the new details we’ve submitted and at the end of the day, conclude in favour of the residents of Sheikh Jarrah.”

“This entire country was established on land theft and stealing homes from Palestinians. I don’t think this system will ever be fair or just to me,” Mohammed el-Kurd, a journalist from another of the families, told reporters.

"I have zero faith in these courts but I do have some hope. But, you know, this is an entity that has behaved for so long with such impunity that I don't think a dozen diplomats are going to change the tide," he added. "Although, I hope. All I can say is that I hope. I hope things go in my favor. Who doesn't want that?"

After a lower Israeli court ruled in favor of the settlers and groups of Jewish settlers terrorized Sheikh Jarrah, setting off massive counter-protests, a delegation of European diplomats visited the neighborhood to "listen from the families who are threatened of expulsion from their homes," an official from the European Union office in Jerusalem [told Anadolu Agency](#) on May 11.

A day earlier, Hamas, the Islamist Palestinian party governing the Gaza Strip, fired off a slew of rockets at Jerusalem as the part of what it called "Operation Sword of Jerusalem," which it said was in defense of Al-Aqsa, the third-holiest site in Islam, in response to [what Palestinians described](#) as its "desecration" by Israeli police.

In response, the IAF began an intense bombing campaign in Gaza, ostensibly targeting Hamas facilities and leading figures. However, in the 11 days that followed, just one-third of the 254 Gazans killed by Israeli bombs, 80 people, [were reported](#) as Hamas militants. By contrast, [67 were children](#).

In Israel, 13 people were killed by Hamas rockets, two of whom were children, since the vast majority of projectiles were intercepted by the Iron Dome air defense system.

The war delayed the Supreme Court's ruling, which had been expected that month.

Israel seized East Jerusalem from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War, having previously captured West Jerusalem in 1948, despite the city being declared an independent international city by the United Nations mandate underpinning Israel's creation. Waves of evictions have slowly removed hundreds of Arab families from the city, to be replaced with Jewish settlers.

The Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah were originally refugees from lands seized by Israel in the 1948 war and were settled on the area north of Old Jerusalem in 1956 via an agreement between the government of Jordan and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The agreement included 28 families. However, since 1967, lawsuits have resulted in the removal of many of them, as Jewish groups have claimed the land was inhabited by Jews before the refugees arrived.

In addition to Sheikh Jarrah, another East Jerusalem neighborhood is also fighting back against eviction: in Silwan, demolition has already begun of several Palestinian homes and businesses to make way for a theme park.

Defense Silwan Committee member Fakhri Abu Diab [told Al-Monitor](#) last month after the IDF declared Silwan a closed military site and set up checkpoints around the town that 6,800 demolition orders had been delivered, threatening more than 1,500 residents.

On May 10, [UNRWA issued a statement](#) in support of the Palestinian families in both Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, noting that Israel's "forced eviction of Palestinians is occurring within the context of Israeli settlement construction and expansion, illegal under international humanitarian law."

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Blinken Warns Iran 'There Will Be a Collective Response' After Deadly Mercer Street Attack  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, an Israeli-managed merchant ship named Mercer Street came under a drone attack that killed two of its crew members who were from the UK and Romania. Although Israel was quick to accuse Iran for the incident, it was not until Sunday that the US agreed and placed blame on the Middle Eastern nation.

The US Department of State informed the American public on Monday that it will be working alongside allies to organize a response against Iran for the recent deadly attack on the Mercer Street commercial ship.

Antony Blinken, who serves as US secretary of state, revealed to reporters during a [Monday briefing](#) that the US is working with the UK, Israel, Romania and "other allies" to come up with a "collective response" to the Mercer Street attack that unfolded as the commercial vessel was transiting the Arabian Sea.

"We are in very close contact and coordination with the UK, Israel [and] Romania," Blinken informed reporters, underscoring that "there will be a collective response" to the incident. However, he further acknowledged that he was unsure whether such a strike constituted as "anything new or augers anything one way or another for the new government [of Iranian President-elect Ebrahim Raisi]," as Iran has been involved in a "series" of similar actions "over many months, including against shipping."

"What it does say is that Iran continues to act with tremendous irresponsibility when it comes to - in this instance - threats to navigation, to commerce, to innocent sailors who are simply engaged in commercial transit in international waters," he added.

Blinken's remarks [largely reiterated](#) comments he offered through a Sunday release that issued blame on Iran, and indicated that the based upon "available information," all signs allegedly pointed Iran as the culprit. "We are confident that Iran conducted this attack, which killed two innocent people, using one-way explosive UAVs, a lethal capability it is increasingly employing throughout the region," the statement read.

The US' condemnation against Iran was voiced despite the Iranian Foreign Ministry [blasting accusations](#) that it had anything to do with the strike, as well as Iranian leadership warning that it fully intends to respond "[immediately and strongly](#)" to any retaliatory moves taken against the Middle Eastern nation.

At the time, Saeed Khatibzadeh, who serves as a spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, told the media that the US and the UK had made "contradictory, false and provocative accusations" the moment officials decided to lay blame on Iran for the July 29 attack.

Tensions between the involved parties were further heightened as reports detailed that Israel is either [brainstorming](#) a response or was already reportedly given a "[green light](#)" from the US and the UK to issue a "response" to the Mercer Street incident. The developments surfaced as Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett accused Iran of being an "exporter of terror, destruction and instability."

Photos [documenting](#) the damages on the Mercer Street have emerged online but have yet to be confirmed by officials. The images initially surfaced online after being shared by Or Heller, a reporter for the Israel's Channel 10 who echoed statements that Iran was at fault for the strike.

Earlier reports detailed that the commercial vessel had been escorted to a safe location by the US Navy and had the ability to function "under her own power." Publicly-available marine traffic data [shows](#) that Mercer Street is within the Gulf of Oman.

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Trump Taxes: What Will The Former President's Financial Docs Reveal After Yearslong Battle by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Although many American presidents have sided with publicly disclosing their tax returns, former US President Donald Trump opted to sidestep the presidential routine and keep those financial disclosures under lock and key, in spite of congressional appeals and a criminal investigation. However, the times are a-changin' now.

The US Department of Justice recently revealed that the US Treasury Department has to comply and provide a congressional panel with former US President Donald Trump's tax returns, effectively bringing to a close a yearslong legal battle between lawmakers.

The order came down in a [39-page memo](#) issued on July 30 by Dawn Johnsen, the acting Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Counsel who concluded that reasoning submitted by the House Ways and Means Committee was "sufficient."

"We believe that there is ample basis to conclude that its June 2021 Request for former President Trump's tax information would further the Committee's principal stated objective of assessing the [Internal Revenue Service's] presidential audit program - a plainly legitimate area for congressional inquiry and possible legislation," Johnsen wrote.

Trump and company had worked hard to reject any efforts to obtain the former president's tax returns, with former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin saying that he would not release the highly-desired documents because they were being requested for partisan reasons.

However, the committee had only sued for the financial disclosures in order to determine whether Trump had complied with US tax laws after concerns had been repeatedly raised in the public about Trump's financial and business practices. It was also rooted in remarks made by Trump that he was unable to release the records during the 2016 election cycle because of an ongoing tax audit.

A fight for Trump's taxes later escalated with Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr.'s efforts to obtain said documents. To date, the legal representative has managed to [obtain copies](#) of Trump's personal and business records as part of his ongoing criminal investigation into the Trump Organization, but only after the matter reached the US Supreme Court.

While that court decision was not in Trump's favor, a court order later determined that the former commander-in-chief would be granted 72 hours to appeal any move for the financial disclosures.

From offering a clearer idea on Trump's net worth to his business ties and any piling debts, it's safe to say that the disclosures will be warmly welcomed by the panel of congressional lawmakers.

Trump's Real Net Worth



Forbes [presently lists](#) Trump as being the only billionaire president in American history after having amassed a wealth of roughly \$2.4 billion. However, much of that fortune is actually tied up in real estate endeavors, many of which ended with contractors swindled or businesses toppled years down the road, such as the failed [Atlantic City casino](#).

Additionally, after having claimed in 2015 that he has a “total net worth of \$8.73 billion,” it’s safe to say that the tax returns will officially lay down the details and possibly provide the public with a more realistic dollar figure, especially after past analysis found that Trump golfing businesses lost hundreds of millions of dollars over the years.

But that’s not all, folks. That very same section may also provide the name of any pass-through entity that is forking over any income to the taxpayer, in this case Trump via any residential, vacation or commercial properties. A “pass-through entity” is defined as a business structure in which a business’ income is handled as an owner’s personal income..

Any charitable donations that were made can also be spotted in Schedule A, with anything over \$500 being fully detailed on a non-cash charitable contribution form that provides a summary on any item, such as a real estate property or artworks, along with its appraised market value.

#### The Taxman’s Toll

Over yonder in Schedule A of US tax forms, lawmakers will also be able to get an idea of any deductible medical expenses, as well as state and local taxes that were paid during the specified tax year.

The matter of whether or not Trump has actually paid any taxes has remained one of the more prominent reasons for the tax standoff, which was only further bolstered by [findings](#) from the New York Times that Trump paid no federal income taxes in 11 of 18 years’ worth of tax filings that had been reviewed by the outlet.

The revelations further indicated that Trump’s tax bill to Uncle Sam in 2017 only came to \$750, and that he managed to lower his family’s tax bill through a variety of loopholes.

In fact, one scheme included handing over nearly \$750,000 to his daughter Ivanka Trump for “consulting fees” even though she had been serving as a top executive at the Trump Organization.

More recently, reports indicated that Trump shifted money from donors into his businesses after saying goodbye to the Oval Office. According to [Forbes](#), that business practice alone amounted to over \$200,000.

#### Ties to An Organized Crime?

And then there’s Trump’s business partners, some of whom are reportedly tied to criminal organizations - think the Sicilian Mafia.

Whether or not Trump had any ties to [La Cosa Nostra](#) stole headlines early on in the 2016 election cycle after lawmakers and even one Republican presidential contender - US Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) - voiced such allegations.

At the time, Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT) agreed that while the claims seemed unlikely, it was only right that Trump handed over the tax returns and gave the American public [insight](#) into “the veracity of a candidate’s representations regarding charities, priorities, wealth, tax conformance, and conflicts of interest.”

However, even before Trump danced with the presidential post, he did indicate during an [appearance](#) on the “Late Show With David Letterman” in 2013 that he had come in contact with

mafiosos “on occasion” while working in New York City, noting that such individuals can be “very nice people,” so long as you don’t owe them any money.

The Trump Organization is being investigated in a “criminal capacity” as New York prosecutors advance their probe into former president Donald Trump’s business dealings, the state attorney general announced Tuesday. “We have informed the Trump Organization that our investigation into the organization is no longer purely civil in nature,” a spokesman for Attorney General Letitia James’ office said. “We are now actively investigating the Trump Organization in a criminal capacity, along with the Manhattan DA.”

Ties between Trump and the mob were also highlighted in decades-long findings by Pulitzer-winning reporter David Cay Johnston, who detailed in a [2016 piece](#) for Politico that the construction of the Trump Plaza “most likely benefited from connection to racketeering.”

At this point, it’s anyone’s guess on what the former president’s taxes may soon reveal or not reveal if the president finds a way to block the Justice Department’s order. US Rep. Ted Lieu, [earlier predicted](#) on MSNBC that any attempts by Trump were likely not going to succeed, and that “it’s not going to be a huge amount of time” to get those documents.

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US Rapper DaBaby Issues Second Apology After Being Dropped From Festivals Over Inflammatory Remarks  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The musician earlier came under fire after he made homophobic remarks during a performance at Florida’s Rolling Loud Festival that encouraged everyone except gay men and those affected by HIV/AIDS from raising their cellphones. The remarks drew widespread condemnation and have since seen the American rapper booted from festival lineups.

American rapper DaBaby issued a more formal apology toward the LGBTQ+ community on Monday after the musician continued to face backlash over offensive remarks that he made during a recent concert in Florida.

The apology statement, which was shared on Instagram and had comments deactivated, acknowledged that his remarks at the Rolling Loud Festival were “hurtful and triggering comments,” and that his statements were “misinformed.”

“I want to apologize to the LGBTQ+ community for the hurtful and triggering comments I made,” reads the statement. “Again, I apologize for my misinformed comments about HIV/AIDS and I know education on this is important.”

Addressing the backlash he has faced from his peers and a bevy of critics, the rapper blasted those who called him out and stated that “social media moves so fast that people want to demolish you before you even have the opportunity to grow, educate, and learn from your mistakes.”

“As a man who has had to make his own way from very difficult circumstances, having people I know publicly working against me - knowing that what I needed was education on these topics and guidance - has been challenging,” he continued.



"I appreciate the many people who came to me with kindness, who reached out to me privately to offer wisdom, education, and resources. That's what I needed and it was received."

The Monday statement came days after DaBaby initially stood by his comments, and had stated during an Instagram Live that his commentary was a ["call to action"](#) and not at all part of a wholly misinformed "rant." It's worth noting that he did incorrectly state during the incident that one could die from HIV/AIDS "in two to three weeks."

However, as the backlash grew against DaBaby and prominent artists such as Elton John, QuestLove and Madonna called the musician out, he soon enough issued his first apology via Twitter.

At the time, he said that anyone who had been affected by HIV/AIDS "got the right to be upset," adding that "what I said was insensitive even though I have no intentions on offending anybody." "But the LGBT community... I ain't trippin on y'all, do you. y'all business is y'all business," he concluded that first apology, which did not magically make the situation any better.

In the days that followed, music festivals including Lollapalooza pulled DaBaby from their lineups and replaced him with other acts. In fact, the rapper's Monday apology was submitted amid the decision to boot him from the performances at the 10th anniversary of the [Governors Ball](#).

The criticism of DaBaby also comes amid backlash over his move to have Tory Lanez, a fellow rapper who was charged with assaulting Megan Thee Stallion in 2020, on stage with him at the Rolling Loud appearance.

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Billionaires Bill and Melinda Gates Officially Divorced After 27 Years of Marriage  
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Bill and Melinda Gates announced in a May joint statement that they had made the decision to end their 27-year union "after a great deal of thought and a lot of work" on the relationship. Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, 65, and "Moment of Lift" author Melinda Gates, 56, have finalized their divorce, and agreed neither party will receive spousal support, according to court documents observed by Us Weekly on Monday.

The Gates' 27-year marriage officially comes to an end nearly three months after they both took to social media [to announce their separation](#).

Per the filing, the court found their "marriage is irretrievably broken" and all property will be divided pursuant to a separate "Separation Contract."

Though the couple has three children, none of them are minors, so neither child support nor custody factored into the divorce.

It is possible that Melinda Gates may receive half of Bill Gates' fortune - estimated somewhere between 124 billion to 131 billion - because the couple did not have a prenuptial agreement. As for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the two initially claimed they would "continue to work together."

However, the Gates Foundation [announced last month that](#), in the event the two cannot work together after two years apart, Melinda Gates "will resign her position as co-chair and trustee" and "receive personal resources from Gates for her philanthropic work."

"These resources would be completely separate from the foundation's endowment, which would not be affected," the Gates Foundation detailed.

After the May announcement of Bill and Melinda Gates' uncoupling, several reports emerged, providing a variety of allegations as to why the couple could not "grow together," as their joint statement claimed.

It was reported in the [Wall Street Journal](#) in May that Bill Gates resigned from the Microsoft Corp. board after a law firm was hired in 2019 to conduct an investigation into a yearslong affair between the Microsoft co-founder and an engineer, who claimed she had a sexual relationship with Gates while working at the company.

"Microsoft received a concern in the latter half of 2019 that Bill Gates sought to initiate an intimate relationship with a company employee in the year 2000," the spokesperson said at the time. "A committee of the Board reviewed the concern, aided by an outside law firm to conduct a thorough investigation. Throughout the investigation, Microsoft provided extensive support to the employee who raised the concern."

However, a Microsoft spokesperson denied that this was the reason for Bill Gates' "transition off the board."

"There was an affair almost 20 years ago which ended amicably," the spokesperson asserted, arguing that Bill Gates' "decision to transition off the board was in no way related to this matter. In fact, he had expressed an interest in spending more time on his philanthropy starting several years earlier."

Since their separation, Melinda Gates has not halted her own philanthropy efforts, and recently teamed up with MacKenzie Scott, the ex-wife of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, and billionaire Lynn Schusterman to [donate \\$40 million to the four project winners](#) of the "Equality Can't Wait Challenge" - a funding competition that seeks to expand "women's power and influence" in the US.

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Simone Biles to Compete in Balance Beam Final in Tokyo, Following Mental Health Break  
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Despite qualifying for all five individual events at the Tokyo Olympics, Team USA gymnast Simone Biles pulled out of all but one event, citing mental health issues. At the same time, Team USA gymnast Sunisa Lee recently became the fifth-straight American to win gold in the all-around gymnastics final.

USA Olympics confirmed on Monday that US gymnasts Biles and Lee would both be competing in the balance beam finals on Tuesday at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

The announcement came after Biles decided to withdraw from a total of four events, including the women's all-around final.



Biles' decision to withdraw from four Olympic events was mocked by several public figures, [such as British provocateur Piers Morgan](#) and Texas Deputy Attorney General Aaron Retiz, [who later recanted his criticism](#) because he is not "adequately versed" on gymnastics and mental health. Despite the public insults leveled against Biles, the 24-year-old has claimed that she has a case of the "twisties" - a term used in the gymnastics community to describe when an athlete loses control during a trick and is unable to determine where they are in the air. Former gymnast Jacoby Miles, who was once a 15-year-old, high-level athlete, [told Sports Illustrated](#) that she endured a case of the "twisties" while attempting a double backflip dismount from the uneven bars when practicing on November 16, 2012.

"That same exact thing that happened to Simone happened to me," she said. "I got lost in the air."

After succumbing to the twisties, Miles landed on her neck and dislocated her fourth cervical vertebra, rendering her paralyzed in all four limbs.

Additionally, supporters of Biles' decision have called attention to a number of incidents when minor slip-ups had catastrophic results.

US gymnast Julissa Gomez, for example, was a 15-year-old Olympic hopeful when her foot slipped on the springboard during a routine maneuver in 1988, causing her to hit the vaulting horse with her head.

The 15-year-old went unconscious and stopped breathing before regaining consciousness soon after. However, she later slipped into a coma and was left with severe brain damage. Gomez's family took care of her for around three years, until the former gymnast died from an infection in 1991.

Gomez's tragedy remains one of the most serious accidents to occur at the professional level of gymnastics.

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Seth MacFarlane Wants 'Family Guy' to Part Ways With Fox After Tucker Carlson's COVID Rant by [Evan Craighead](#)

"Family Guy" creator Seth MacFarlane is no stranger to having his shows move networks, as "American Dad," another animated sitcom created by the 47-year-old, was cancelled by Fox in 2013, and picked up by TBS in 2014. Additionally, "The Orville," MacFarlane's science-fiction comedy-drama, originally aired on Fox, but has been moved to Hulu.

MacFarlane took to Twitter on Sunday to express his displeasure with Fox News opinion show Tucker Carlson and the Fox Corporation, the mass medium company that oversees both Fox News and the Fox Broadcasting Company.

"Tucker Carlson's latest opinion piece once again makes me wish Family Guy was on any other network," he wrote, referring to a recent broadcast of "Tucker Carlson Tonight."

[During the segment in question](#), Carlson demonized the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and lambasted the US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murth, suggesting that the recent calls for mask mandates and other mitigation methods to combat the Delta variant of COVID-19 are "pushing us toward something awful."

He also suggested - without evidence - that the vaccines administered by the US are not working as once advertised.

MacFarlane padded his admonishment of the network with an ominous joke.

"Look, Fox, we both know this marriage isn't working anymore," he said.

"The sex is only once a year, I don't get along with your mother, and well... I've been having an affair with NBC," MacFarlane concluded, referring to a recent overall deal inked between him and NBC Universal's Universal Content Productions.

This is not the first time MacFarlane has been critical of the network that features "Family Guy." In 2018, he urged his Twitter followers to "think critically" and "consult multiple news sources," rather than "blindly obey Fox News."

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**Biden to Announce Milestone 110Mln COVID-19 Vaccines Distributed Worldwide - White House**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden on Tuesday will deliver remarks around the delivery of 110 million COVID-19 vaccines to over 60 countries with another half a billion Pfizer jabs are set to begin shipping at the end of August, White House said.

"Today, the [US] President [Joe Biden] will announce that the U.S. has now donated and shipped more than 110 million doses of its COVID-19 vaccines to more than 60 countries," White House said in a release on Tuesday. "Starting at the end of this month, the Administration will begin shipping a half a billion Pfizer doses that the United States has pledged to purchase and donate to 100 low-income countries in need."

The Biden Administration has worked closely with COVAX and a range of regional partners like the African Union and the Caribbean Community to deliver the vaccines, the release said.

In May, the Biden Administration announced its plans to donate at least 80 million Pfizer and Moderna vaccines to the countries which needed it most to fight the novel coronavirus followed soon by another commitment to donate 500 million Pfizer doses to nearly 100 countries starting in August.

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**RPT: ANALYSIS - Biden's Sanctions Unlikely to Hurt China Unless Other Western States Follow Suit**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US sanctions targeting nearly 60 Chinese companies will not have a significant impact and may even backfire unless other Western countries are prompted to do the same, analysts told Sputnik.

On Monday, new US restrictions on American investments in 59 Chinese companies went into effect over allegations the firms were tied to China's military and Beijing's surveillance efforts.



Many see the move as yet another example of President Joe Biden continuing the same tough line against Beijing as that taken by his predecessor.

#### NARROW RESTRICTIONS, LITTLE IMPACT

Beijing quickly hit back against the United States economic sanctions, accusing Washington of hypocrisy. During talks in the Chinese city of Tianjin last week, Foreign Minister Wang Yi told US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman that the United States should honor its own rhetoric about following international trade rules.

"Taken in isolation, this move will not affect the targeted Chinese corporations in a significant way," Global Policy Institute President Paolo von Schirach said. "Any short-term damage to China from the White House announcement was likely going to be more about image and reputation rather than a serious hit on the viability of the targeted corporations."

However, Schirach said the US action could have an impact if other Western countries followed by imposing similar investment restrictions.

International trade analyst Alan Tonelson believes Biden's latest measures were certain to be unsuccessful.

"President Biden's latest curbs on US investment in Chinese entities... suffer the same fundamental problem as previous, similar decisions taken by him and by President Trump: They tackle the intertwined China economic, technology, and national security threats on a piecemeal basis," Tonelson said.

US interests could not be defended and advanced by dealing with isolated parts of the Chinese government and economy, Tonelson added.

"Unless Washington implements a wide-ranging decoupling strategy, regardless of near-term economic costs, Americans will keep on feeding [China] and increasing its power," Tonelson said.

#### TRYING TO CHECK CHINA FUTILE

The Biden administration's new measures come as China's economy continues to boom, with some projecting it can overtake the United States in a few years. Some experts feel that it is a waste of time trying to halt China's rise and that, in fact, the measures could even backfire. Meanwhile, China has not shut the door to working together. At last week's talks, Wang told Sherman Beijing is ready to develop cooperation and "seek common prosperity" together with all countries, including the United States.

US historian James Bradley, author of "Flags of Our Fathers" which became a major Hollywood movie, sees the move as a bad strategy that will be fully realized in retrospect.

"My first reaction was to imagine amazed Chinese years from now recalling the end of American Empire and that in 2021 the Dollar Country imagined it could squeeze rising China through its falling dollar and creaky financial system," Bradley said. "For over a decade, I've been preaching that the United States could be a strong #2 to China, but it's #1 or nothing to some, I guess."

The United States needed to acknowledge the reality of China's inevitable rise and develop long-term constructive economic relations with Beijing instead of indulging in such hostile policies that were bound to be futile, Bradley advised.

"I'm a former salesman who thinks that it is better to have good relations with rich and rising organizations," Bradley added.

Schirach, who also chairs the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Bay Atlantic University in Washington, DC, warned that China is likely to strike back.

"It is very likely that the Chinese government will retaliate against American economic interests in some fashion. Maybe Beijing will create a list of US companies no longer allowed to do business in China or impose new operating restrictions on them," he said.

Political commentator Professor John Walsh predicted Biden's move looked certain to drive China and Russia into still closer economic and strategic cooperation. He also advised that Moscow and Beijing should take the opportunity to collaborate and contain the United States. "If China and Russia do not hang together, as they say, they will surely hang separately," he said.

The new sanctions, Walsh observed, followed tough confrontational meetings that sent an unmistakable message the United States was in a hostile confrontation with Beijing.

"The gloves are off with [Secretary of State Antony] Blinken and the other operators of the nasty and cruel Biden Hologram," Walsh said.

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RPT: PREVIEW - US Navy, Marine Corp to Conduct First Large Naval, Amphibious Exercise Since Cold War

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US Navy and Marine Corps will be jointly participating in Large Scale Exercise (LSE) 2021, the first naval and amphibious exercise conducted of such magnitude since 1981, starting on Tuesday.

The exercise will take place August 3-16 across 17 time zones, and will include six Navy and Marine Corps component commands, five numbered naval fleets, and three Marine Expeditionary Forces.

"LSE 2021 will include approximately 36 live ships underway ranging from aircraft carriers to submarines, over 50 virtual units and an unlimited array of constructive units in addition to the Sailors, Marines, Government civilian and contract employees assigned to command and training staffs providing support to the exercise," the US Navy's Sixth Fleet said in a statement about the exercise.

LSE 2021 is designed to demonstrate to US competitors the American military remains ready at the high-end of warfare because of its global operational commitments, not in spite of them, it added. It is set to become a triennial exercise that will include allies from other countries.

The scenario-driven, globally-integrated exercise will demonstrate the flexibility of US forces during Distributed Maritime Operations, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, and Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment.

"LSE will test our commanders across the spectrum of naval warfare from the tactical to the strategic, integrating the Marine Corps to demonstrate the world-wide fleet's ability to conduct coordinated operations from the open ocean to the littoral," Commander of the US Sixth Fleet Vice Admiral Gene Black said.



LSE 2021 will partially overlap with the ongoing Agile Spirit exercises in the Caucasus mountains of Georgia, which were scheduled for July 26 through August 6. The war exercises include participants from countries across Europe and the Caucasus and are intended to enhance the readiness and interoperability of US, Georgian, and allied forces.

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RPT - US Navy Would Welcome Opportunity to Engage With Russian Counterparts - Vice Admiral

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States Navy would welcome any chance to positively engage with its Russian military counterparts on a range of areas in the Arctic, US Second Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Andrew Lewis, told Sputnik on the sidelines of the 2021 Sea-Air-Space Conference and Exposition.

"We would welcome any opportunity to engage positively with our military counterparts," Lewis said when asked about US-Russia collaboration in the Arctic on Monday.

Areas of cooperation, Lewis added, could include exploration of oil and gas and precious metals, search and rescue and safety at sea, along with professional behavior. For example, he added, the professional and cooperative nature between Russia and Norway is the reason why that area has the most fertile fishing grounds in the world.

"I think we have adequate cooperation, but there's areas we can cooperate more in which to be more respectful, but also for the greater good," Lewis said. "It's [current cooperation] acceptable, but I would have ambitions for more."

Lewis said a couple years ago while operating in the Baltics in and around Russian forces it was professional and there were never any problems or issues.

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RPT - Ex-Afghan Interpreter Says Risked Everything for US, Warns of Bleak Future in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Former Afghan interpreter Ismail Khan risked his life to help US special forces between 2006 and 2012, and although he now lives in the US state of Washington, he warns of a bleak future for Afghanistan, especially for Afghans who helped US forces but have not yet been evacuated as promised.

"I risked everything... My house was a safe zone for special forces, we planned a lot of meetings in my house, we talked to tribal leaders and did whatever we could to make sure they succeed," Khan told Sputnik. "I was really happy to do that, [but] I did not know the consequences at that time, what it would bring to my family."

Thousands of Afghans are trying to flee Afghanistan as the United States withdrawal nears completion and the military offensive of the Taliban movement (outlawed in Russia) to recapture the country intensifies.

"[Taliban] they're going after every single person [interpreter], they will show no mercy... This is something happening on the ground there, it's heartbreaking for those who stood with the US government at a time when they needed them the most, but now they are left behind," Khan said.

Last week, the first group of nearly 250 Afghans who worked for the US military and diplomatic missions in Afghanistan arrived at Fort Lee, Virginia, and will boost efforts to evacuate more this month.

Politico reported, citing a US official, that the State Department is planning to evacuate an additional 4,000 applicants for the special immigrant visa program and their family members later this month, which brings the overall total for the group up to 20,000 refugees. The Afghan interpreters are expected to be flown out from Kabul to third countries, the report said.

In addition, the US State Department said on Monday the United States is widening eligibility for priority refugee admission for thousands more Afghans who worked with US forces but are not eligible for the Special Immigrant Visas (SIV).

Over the last several months, Afghans who served as interpreters and in other roles for US forces have faced increasing threats from the Taliban. The United States promised to get all Afghan allies out of Afghanistan before the US withdrawal is expected to be done by August 31. Khan said he has many friends and family members who worked alongside US forces and are still waiting to be evacuated out of Afghanistan.

"One of my cousins, who worked for about ten years with the US special forces, in 2013 his son who was nine years old was kidnapped by the Taliban and they were asking for \$150,000 US dollars," Khan said. "They gave some money and work with the government and released the son. About four months ago they killed his older son. So these are the consequences [for] the support that they have for the US government, that's what they get waiting for a visa. [Taliban] they're going to kill every single one of them [interpreters] if they take over the country."

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley said about half of the 419 district centers in Afghanistan are under Taliban control, but not any of the 34 provincial capitals in the country.

"They [Taliban] do not have any interest [in peace]," Khan said. "They will never do peace. If they wanted to do peace, they would have done it a long time ago, but we have been hearing about these negotiations and talks for years. [Taliban] they are more violent every single day."

US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Gen. Frank McKenzie disclosed last month that the United States has increased airstrikes against the Taliban in support of Afghan forces over the last several days and is prepared to continue strikes in the coming weeks if the Taliban continues its attacks.

Afghanistan will fall into further turmoil and become a safe haven for terrorists, including the Islamic State [banned in Russia], Khan predicts.

"ISIS is already there [in Afghanistan] and if the Taliban takes over it will be a safe haven for most of the terrorists. Afghanistan will be their safe zone," Khan said. "They will definitely go there and do their operations from Afghanistan. Whoever comes in their way, they will be killed."

The United States has called on neighboring countries, such as Pakistan, to do more to bring stability to the region after a US exit, but Khan does not believe that is realistic.



"I wish Pakistan and other countries would stop interrupting in the peace process. People need to understand Taliban is just a name, these are the neighboring countries that they don't want stability and peace in Afghanistan," Khan said. "I don't think that the world needs to rely on neighboring countries."

Afghan First Vice President Amrullah Saleh has continuously accused Pakistan of facilitating the Taliban takeover attempt in Afghanistan.

"Afg[hanistan] is under a full scale invasion of Talib [Taliban] terrorists who have an organized backing and sponsorship in Pakistan," Saleh said via Twitter on Sunday. "It has to be tackled. Talibs use Doha office for deception. They have no intention to engage in meaningful negotiations."

Khan warns that the United States is withdrawing from Afghanistan at the wrong time and predicts US forces will find themselves in a similar situation like Iraq, when a withdrawal of US forces was followed by the emergence of the Islamic State terror group.

"If they [US] wanted to pull out, they should have done it in 2006, they should have done it in 2010, this is not the right time to do it and with that short period of time when the Taliban are on the rise and they are more violent," Khan said. "When they see that the US are out, they are pushing their operations, their attacks on the local population as well. So I don't think this is the right time."

US Defense Department said on Thursday in its quarterly report from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) that the Afghan government faces an existential crisis unless the military offensive by the Taliban movement is reversed.

The report said the absence of a major US troop presence will be consequential and create a greater challenge for the Afghan government in light of growing insurgent pressure.

Leaving Afghans behind during the rise of the Taliban "will definitely affect future cooperation," Khan said.

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Sullivan, Incoming Israeli Security Adviser Discuss Iran 'Threat' - White House

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and incoming Israeli National Security Adviser Eyal Hulata during a meeting agreed to consult closely on Iran, the White House said in a press release.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met today with incoming Israeli National Security Advisor Dr. Eyal Hulata," the release said on Monday. "Mr. Sullivan and Dr. Hulata discussed the strategic challenges in the region, including the threat posed by Iran, and agreed to consult closely on these issues."

Sullivan also underscored other matters of mutual interest, such as advancing Israeli relations with Arab countries in the region and stabilizing relations with the Palestinians, the release said. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a press briefing on Monday that the United States is confident Iran carried out a drone attack against the Mercer Street vessel and the US

administration is consultations with Israel, the United Kingdom, and Romania to coordinate a collective response.

Earlier on Monday, US Central Command said CENTCOM Commander Gen. Frank McKenzie had a telephone call with Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kohavi to discuss regional security issues as well.

The Japanese-owned vessel was attacked off the coast of Oman last week, resulting in the deaths of two crew members, citizens of Romania and the United Kingdom. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett accused Iran of being involved in the attack. Later, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made statements to the same effect.

Iran has denied having any role in the incident. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh rejected the statements by the United States and the United Kingdom as groundless.

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**ANALYSIS - Biden's Sanctions Unlikely to Hurt China Unless Other Western States Follow Suit**

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Beijing quickly hit back against the United States economic sanctions, accusing Washington of hypocrisy. During talks in the Chinese city of Tianjin last week, Foreign Minister Wang Yi told US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman that the United States should honor its own rhetoric about following international trade rules.

"Taken in isolation, this move will not affect the targeted Chinese corporations in a significant way," Global Policy Institute President Paolo von Schirach said. "Any short-term damage to China from the White House announcement was likely going to be more about image and reputation rather than a serious hit on the viability of the targeted corporations."

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US interests could not be defended and advanced by dealing with isolated parts of the Chinese government and economy, Tonelson added.

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#### TRYING TO CHECK CHINA FUTILE

The Biden administration's new measures come as China's economy continues to boom, with some projecting it can overtake the United States in a few years. Some experts feel that it is a waste of time trying to halt China's rise and that, in fact, the measures could even backfire. Meanwhile, China has not shut the door to working together. At last week's talks, Wang told Sherman Beijing is ready to develop cooperation and "seek common prosperity" together with all countries, including the United States.

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Trump to Hold Rally in the US State of Alabama on August 21 - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump will hold a rally in the state of Alabama on August 21, his office said in a statement.

"President Donald J. Trump, 45th President of the United States of America, will deliver remarks at a major rally in Cullman, Alabama, on Saturday, August 21, 2021," the statement said on Monday.

The rally will be hosted by the Alabama Republican party, the statement said.

Trump, who despite not holding any office continues to wield significant influence over the Republican Party, threatened GOP lawmakers with stiff opposition at primary elections should they go through with the deal.

In all of his public appearances since President Joe Biden took office, Trump has been accusing the Democrats of having "stolen" votes from him, calling for election reform in the United States. Several US election security agencies and the Justice Department disputed Trump's allegations of election and voter fraud. The Trump campaign lost more than 60 lawsuits alleging voter fraud in a failed bid to reverse the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.

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IMF Approves Historic \$650Bln SDR Allocation to Boost Global Liquidity - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced that the organization has approved a historic \$650 billion worth of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) that will act as a "shot in the arm" of the global economy.

"The Board of Governors of the IMF has approved a general allocation of Special Drawing Rights equivalent to US\$650 billion (about SDR 456 billion) on August 2, 2021, to boost global liquidity," the IMF said in a press release on Monday.

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Blinken Not Expected to Engage With DPRK Counterpart at ASEAN Forum - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has no plans to engage with North Korea's foreign minister during the upcoming Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional forum that they will both be attending later this week, a senior State Department official told reporters.

"We expect that the DPRK foreign minister will participate in the ASEAN regional forum, as he has participated in the past. Secretary Blinken has no plans to engage him on any particular issues," the official said on Monday.

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Blinken to Urge ASEAN to Hold Burmese Government Accountable - State Dept.



WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will urge members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to hold the Burmese government accountable during ministerial meetings later this week, a senior State Department official told reporters.

"Secretary Blinken will discuss the region's challenging and complex issues, not the least of which is the coup in Burma, which has impacted all of ASEAN and threatens the stability of the entire region. The secretary will address this issue in detail during each ministerial meeting. He will urge ASEAN to hold the Burma military junta accountable to the April 24 ASEAN leaders five-point consensus," the official said on Monday.

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Trump to Fight Justice Dept. Order to Send Tax Returns to Congress - Defense Lawyer

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Trump attorney Ronald Fischetti said in a statement they will fight to prevent the US Justice Department from handing over former President Donald Trump's tax returns to the House Ways and Means Committee.

"There is no evidence of any wrongdoing here and I object to the release of the returns not only on behalf of my client but on behalf of all future holders of the office of the president of the United States," Fischetti said on Monday.

On Friday, acting Assistant Attorney General Dawn Johnsen said in a memorandum the Treasury Department must hand over Trump's tax returns to the US House Ways and Means Committee.

The Ways and Means Committee has requested six years of Trump's individual tax returns and tax returns of eight Trump-related businesses, the memorandum said.

The memorandum said the Ways and Means Committee is interested in obtaining Trump's tax returns in order to check the presence of any foreign financial influences, business entanglements concerning tax laws, or conflicts of interest that may have affected his responsibilities as US president.

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Blinken to Announce New Deliverables to Support ASEAN Economic Recovery - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will be announcing new deliverables intended to support the economic recovery of ASEAN nations from the impact of COVID-19 during an upcoming ministerial meeting with the group, a senior State Department official said.

"Tomorrow evening, August 3, the secretary will co-chair the US-ASEAN ministerial, a meeting of the 10 ASEAN nations and the US. In addition to addressing pressing policy issues, the

secretary will announce several new and exciting deliverables to support ASEAN's economic recovery," the official said on Monday.

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Blinken to Discuss China, COVID Vaccine Access With ASEAN States - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will discuss issues ranging from China, to COVID vaccine access, to people-to-people ties with member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) later this week, a senior State Department official told reporters.

"[Blinken] intends to take the momentum from the July 13 meeting to address many of the pressing issue facing the countries of Southeast Asia today, including COVID-19, vaccine access, economic recovery, the climate crisis, the situation in Burma, and PRC coercion in the South China Sea and Mekong subregion," the official said on Monday.

Blinken will also discuss cybersecurity, the digital economy, alleged human rights violations in China, and the US commitment to people-to-people ties.

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CDC Extends Rule Allowing Immediate Expulsion of Migrants on US Border Due to COVID-19

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a press release that it has extended the Trump-era policy authorizing immigration enforcement to immediately turn away undocumented migrants on the United States' borders as part of an effort to control the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued an order... that temporarily suspends the introduction of certain noncitizens based on the Director's determination that introduction of such noncitizens, regardless of their country of origin, migrating through Canada and Mexico into the United States creates a serious danger of the introduction of COVID-19 into the United States, and the danger is so increased by the introduction of such noncitizens that a temporary suspension is necessary to protect the public health," the release said on Monday.

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UPDATE - US Treasury Begins Taking 'Extraordinary Measures' After Debt Limit Reinstated - Yellen



WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department has started taking extraordinary cash-conservation measures to avoid bursting the federal borrowing limit after a two-year suspension of the debt ceiling expired at the end of July, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

"Due to the reinstatement of the debt limit, on July 30 Treasury suspended until further notice the sale of state and local government series securities. This letter serves to notify you... of additional extraordinary measures Treasury began using today," Yellen said on Monday in a letter addressed to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, and copied to Republican leaders in both chambers of Congress.

Yellen warned in another letter last week that there would be "irreparable harm" to the US sovereign rating and economy if the debt limit was not raised, amid signs that Republican lawmakers did not want to approve a higher debt ceiling.

Separately, the bipartisan Congressional Budget Office cautioned last week that the US government will most likely run out of money between October and November unless the debt ceiling is raised.

Yellen said the extraordinary measures included suspending fully or partly investments in the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund, the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund and a section of the Federal Employees Retirement. These were flexible investments that could be made in due course, and other US treasury secretaries have also suspended them previously in times of emergency, she said.

Yellen reminded the Congressional leaders in her letter last week that the current level of US debt reflected the cumulative effect of all prior spending and tax decisions made by both Democratic and Republican administrations over time.

Increasing or suspending the debt limit did not increase government spending or authorize spending for future budget proposals, but a failure to meet debt obligations could result in repercussions such as the first-ever US credit rating downgrade suffered in 2011, she said.

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**US to Provide \$30Mln in COVID-19 Aid to Indonesia - National Security Advisor**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has informed Indonesia that it will provide an additional \$30 million in coronavirus-related assistance, National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said in a press release.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met today with Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi of Indonesia in Washington, DC to discuss opportunities to deepen the US-Indonesia Strategic Partnership," Horne said on Monday. "Mr. Sullivan informed Foreign Minister Marsudi that the United States will provide an additional \$30 million in COVID-19 assistance to Indonesia."

The United States has provided the government of Indonesia more than \$65 million in assistance since the coronavirus pandemic started, Horne said.

The United States will continue to high-level talks with Indonesia to promote freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region, Horne added.

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**Biden Administration Urges Rest of Government to Extend Eviction Moratorium - White House**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is calling on the federal health agency to agree to taking executive action and extending the pandemic-induced moratorium on evictions, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters.

"Given the rising urgency of containing the spread of the Delta variant, on Sunday, the President asked the CDC to consider once again the possibility of executive action. He raised the prospect of a new, 30-day eviction moratorium - focused on counties with High or Substantial case rates—to protect renters," Psaki said on Monday.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky and her team have been unable to find the legal authority needed for a new eviction moratorium, however. As a result, the Biden administration has directed his cabinet as well as state and local governments to do everything within their powers to prevent evictions.

Biden asked that all governors and mayors extend eviction moratoriums for a period of two months. He also directed several federal agencies to examine why state and local governments failed to distribute the rental assistance provided to them by Congress.

"We are going to do an all-agency review to make sure that we understand any potential reason why state and local governments are not getting funds out," American Rescue Plan coordinator Gene Sperling said.

Biden also directed the US Treasury Department to make clear to states and localities that they can use emergency housing and local relief money to support eviction prevention efforts.

The initiative from the White House comes amid discussion of congressional action on the matter as well, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi having called for fellow Democrats to support an extension of the eviction moratorium earlier on Monday.

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**SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) -

**US-RUSSIA RELATIONS**

\* The US Embassy in Moscow will remain open but operations at other facilities in Russia remain suspended, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

\* The US government expects Russian diplomats in the United States whose visas have expired to leave the country and apply for an extension, Price said.

\* The United States Navy would welcome any chance to positively engage with its Russian military counterparts on a range of areas in the Arctic, US Second Fleet Commander, Vice



Admiral Andrew Lewis, told Sputnik on the sidelines of the 2021 Sea-Air-Space Conference and Exposition.

\* There are many more areas the United States and Russia can target for collaboration for the greater good in the Arctic although current cooperation is at an adequate level, Lewis said.

#### AFGHANISTAN

\* The United States condemns reports of atrocities committed by the Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) in areas where it is advancing as disturbing and unacceptable, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

\* A second flight carrying Afghan nationals who worked with US forces arrived in the United States on Monday, Blinken said, adding that two flights brought to the country some 400 people.

\* A new US refugee program for Afghans who are not eligible for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) to the United States will face considerable challenges ahead, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

\* The Taliban cannot count on a reprieve from the international community if it seizes control of Afghanistan by force, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

\* The UN Security Council is deeply concerned about the situation in Afghanistan, Security Council's President for August, Indian Ambassador T. S. Tirumurti said in a press briefing on Monday.

#### ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN TENSIONS

\* The Armenian Defense Ministry said on Monday that Armenian positions along the north and southeastern border with Azerbaijan have come under fire from that country.

#### BUS INCIDENT IN TURKEY

The Russian Consulate General in Antalya confirmed to Sputnik that three Russians had been killed in an accident with a tourist bus in Turkey, and another five had been seriously injured.

#### NORD STREAM 2

\* German Environment Agency head Dirk Messner said on Monday that Germany's pursuit of a transition to green sources of energy may render the Russian-led gas project Nord Stream 2 redundant.

\* Foreign affairs committee chairs of the US Senate and several European parliaments jointly expressed opposition to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project and called on NATO to strengthen deterrence against an alleged threat from Russia.

#### CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

\* The number of COVID-19-related deaths in the United States has increased by more than 25 percent over the previous seven-day period, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky said on Monday.

\* The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Monday issued an advisory placing Greece, Ireland, Iran, Kazakhstan and the US Virgin Islands placing them in the category of highest risk for COVID-19 and advising Americans not to travel there.

#### US-ISRAEL MILITARY COOPERATION

\* Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kohavi held a telephone conversation on regional security and Israeli-US cooperation with Central Command (CENTCOM) chief General Frank McKenzie, CENTCOM said on Monday.

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**RPT - PREVIEW Boeing Starliner Set to Launch on Delayed Unmanned Cargo Mission to ISS on Tuesday**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – Boeing's Starliner spacecraft designed for manned flight will launch on its second test un-crewed cargo mission to the International Space Station (ISS) on Tuesday after a delay from last week over weather conditions, NASA announced.

"Starliner will launch on a United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket from Space Launch Complex-41 at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida," the agency said in a press release. "The mission is targeted to launch at 1:20 pm EDT [Eastern Daylight Time] Tuesday, August 3."

About 30 minutes after launch, Starliner will perform its orbital insertion burn to begin its daylong trip to the space station, the agency said.

"The spacecraft is scheduled to dock [at] the space station at 1:37 pm [EDT] Wednesday, August 4," the release said.

The US space agency described the OFT-2 flight as "an important un-crewed mission designed to test the end-to-end capabilities of the new system for NASA's Commercial Crew Program."

The spacecraft will carry more than 400 pounds of NASA cargo and crew supplies to the ISS, NASA said.

It will then return to Earth with more than 550 pounds of cargo, including reusable Nitrogen Oxygen Recharge System (NORS) tanks that provide breathable air to station crew members, the agency added.

"OFT-2 will demonstrate the end-to-end capabilities of the Starliner spacecraft and Atlas V rocket from launch to docking to a return to Earth in the desert of the western United States," the US space agency said in an earlier release.

The un-crewed mission will provide valuable data toward NASA certifying Boeing's crew transportation system for regular flights with astronauts to and from the ISS, the agency noted. The test launch was originally scheduled for last Friday but was delayed because of weather conditions in the area, the space agency acknowledged.

Starliner's previous and first un-crewed test mission was in December 2019, when it failed to dock with the ISS because of an orbit insertion anomaly.

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## One Year After Beirut Port Blast, 98% of Affected Families Still Need Support - UNICEF

UNITED NATIONS, August 2 (Sputnik) - One year on from the massive explosions that devastated the Lebanese capital of Beirut, the needs of affected children and families remain acute, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said in a rapid assessment on Tuesday.

On August 4 last year, 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate stored in the port of Beirut exploded, wiping out much of the port and surrounding neighborhoods. The powerful blast left more than 200 people dead, including six children, and injured more than 6,500 individuals.

"One year after massive explosions devastated lives, livelihoods and a large swathe of Beirut,... a UNICEF survey conducted in July 2021 shows the situation remains dire: seven in ten households (70 percent) requested basic assistance after the explosions and almost all of those families (98.1 percent) still need the support," UNICEF said.

According to the survey, one in three families, or 34%, reported their children were still showing signs of psychological distress, while in adults, the figure reached 45.6%.

Some 43.6% of households said they had at least one family member who lost employment due to the explosion, with half of them still remaining unemployed.

In addition, one in four responders said they had lost one family member diagnosed with COVID-19 since the explosions. Some 47.5% had at least one adult injured in the blast.

With the blasts destroying about 73,000 apartments, 97% of families affected said they needed repairs a year after, while over 20% of the families with at least one child still live in a temporary place.

UNICEF said in 2021, the situation in Lebanon has gotten "much, much worse" amid the unprecedented economic crisis, a political stalemate and a worsening COVID-19 crisis.

The agency called on the Lebanese leaders to overcome political differences and form a government capable of servicing its people and putting the country on a recovery plan.

It also urged for a transparent and credible investigation to hold those responsible accountable and deliver justice to the affected families.

UNICEF further appealed for a minimum of \$85 million to scale up life-saving services over the next five months for 540,000 children facing the crisis in Lebanon.

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## PREVIEW - US Navy, Marine Corp to Conduct First Large Naval, Amphibious Exercise Since Cold War

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US Navy and Marine Corps will be jointly participating in Large Scale Exercise (LSE) 2021, the first naval and amphibious exercise conducted of such magnitude since 1981, starting on Tuesday.

The exercise will take place August 3-16 across 17 time zones, and will include six Navy and Marine Corps component commands, five numbered naval fleets, and three Marine Expeditionary Forces.



"LSE 2021 will include approximately 36 live ships underway ranging from aircraft carriers to submarines, over 50 virtual units and an unlimited array of constructive units in addition to the Sailors, Marines, Government civilian and contract employees assigned to command and training staffs providing support to the exercise," the US Navy's Sixth Fleet said in a statement about the exercise.

LSE 2021 is designed to demonstrate to US competitors the American military remains ready at the high-end of warfare because of its global operational commitments, not in spite of them, it added. It is set to become a triennial exercise that will include allies from other countries.

The scenario-driven, globally-integrated exercise will demonstrate the flexibility of US forces during Distributed Maritime Operations, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, and Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment.

"LSE will test our commanders across the spectrum of naval warfare from the tactical to the strategic, integrating the Marine Corps to demonstrate the world-wide fleet's ability to conduct coordinated operations from the open ocean to the littoral," Commander of the US Sixth Fleet Vice Admiral Gene Black said.

LSE 2021 will partially overlap with the ongoing Agile Spirit exercises in the Caucasus mountains of Georgia, which were scheduled for July 26 through August 6. The war exercises include participants from countries across Europe and the Caucasus and are intended to enhance the readiness and interoperability of US, Georgian, and allied forces.

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US Recommends Avoiding Travel to Greece, Ireland, Iran Over Risk of COVID-19 - CDC

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Monday issued an advisory placing Greece, Ireland, Iran, Kazakhstan and the US Virgin Islands placing them in the category of highest risk for COVID-19 and advising Americans not to travel there.

The updated advisory also recommends to avoid travel to Isle of Man in the United Kingdom, which has been on the "Do not travel" list of countries since July 19.

According to the CDC advisory, if a country is found on the highest, fourth level of the coronavirus risk, even fully vaccinated travelers may be at risk of getting and spreading the coronavirus variants.

As of Monday, the Delta variant of the novel coronavirus is believed to be the most prevalent and fastest spreading mutation in the world albeit not as deadly. The Delta variant was first reported in India in October 2020 and has already become the predominant strain in a number of countries, including the United States.

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#### US, Israeli Military Leaders Discuss Regional Events After Mercer Incident - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kohavi held a telephone conversation on regional security and Israeli-US cooperation with Central Command (CENTCOM) chief General Frank McKenzie, CENTCOM said on Monday. "General Frank McKenzie, Commander, US Central Command spoke with IDF Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Aviv Kohavi by phone today," CENTCOM said via Twitter. "The two discussed recent regional events and cooperation between both countries."

CENTCOM said the two generals also shared their perspectives on the region's dynamic security environment and opportunities for future cooperation.

Earlier on Monday, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz said that Iran's alleged involvement in the attack on the Mercer Street tanker in the Indian Ocean violated international law and was an act of "escalation." Gantz told the Knesset that Israel had to act immediately in response against Iran.

The Japanese-owned vessel was attacked off the coast of Oman last week, resulting in the deaths of two crew members, citizens of Romania and the United Kingdom. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett accused Iran of being involved in the attack. Later, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made statements to the same effect.

Iran has denied having any role in the incident. Also on Monday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh rejected the statements by the United States and the United Kingdom as groundless.

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#### COVID-19 Deaths in US Increased More Than 25% Over Previous 7-Day Period - CDC Director

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The number of COVID-19 deaths in the United States has increased by more than 25 percent over the previous seven-day period, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky said on Monday.

"Seven-day average daily deaths have also increased to 300 per day, an increase of more than 25 percent from the previous seven-day period," Walensky said during a COVID-19 response team press conference.

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#### US Treasury Begins Taking 'Extraordinary Measures' After Debt Limit Reinstated - Yellen

WASHINGTON, Aug 2 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury has started taking extraordinary cash-conservation measures to avoid bursting the federal borrowing limit after a two-year

suspension of the debt ceiling expired at the end of July, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Monday.

"Due to the reinstatement of the debt limit, on July 30 Treasury suspended until further notice the sale of state and local government series securities. This letter serves to notify you ... of additional extraordinary measures Treasury began using today," Yellen said in a letter addressed to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, and copied to Republicans leaders in both Congress and the Senate.

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#### Bill, Melinda Gates Finalize Divorce - Court Documents

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US billionaire entrepreneur Bill Gates and his wife Melinda have finalized their divorce after 27 years of marriage, NBC News reported on Monday citing court documents.

The terms of the division of assets were submitted in a separate document that was not included in Monday's dissolution decree, the report said.

The Microsoft founder and his now ex-wife, who have three adult children, announced their split in early May.

Melinda Gates had reportedly retained divorce lawyers in 2019 amid concerns over revelations of her now her now former husband's relationship with convicted pedophile and human trafficker Jeffrey Epstein. Reports have also alleged that Gates was involved in extramarital trysts, including one with an employee.

The former couple has said they will continue to work together at their foundation that bears their names.

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#### Third Known Police Officer That Responded to Capitol Riot Committed Suicide - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - A third police officer who responded to the US Capitol riot on January 6 has committed suicide, CNN reported citing the Washington Metropolitan Police Department on Monday.

Police Officer Gunther Hashida was found dead at his home on Thursday, the report said.

Police Officer Jeffrey Smith and US Capitol Police Officer Howard Liebengood had also responded to the Capitol riot and later died by suicide.

On January 6, a group of supporters of former President Donald Trump entered the US Capitol in a bid to protest the lawmakers certifying the 2020 election results from several states Trump said were fraudulent. One protester was shot dead during the incident and federal law enforcement authorities have charged more than 500 people for their participation in the unrest.



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**Blinken to Discuss South China Sea, Myanmar During ASEAN Meetings This Week - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during ministerial meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) this week will discuss a range of mutual issues concerning the South China Sea, Myanmar (Burma), and the coronavirus pandemic, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"During this week's meetings, Secretary Blinken will... reiterate US positions on pressing regional issues, including calling on the Burmese junta to immediately end the violence and restore Burma to the path of democracy; supporting freedom of the seas in the South China Sea," Price said.

Blinken will urge ASEAN member states to fully implement United Nations Security Council resolutions on North Korea, Price said.

Blinken and his counterparts will also discuss efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, including economic recovery efforts, and climate change, Price said.

The virtual ASEAN meetings will take place Monday through Friday.

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**US Approves \$82Mln Harpoon Anti-Ship Missile Sale to India - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration has approved the \$82 million sale of a Harpoon over-the-horizon anti-ship missile test kit to India, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Monday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of India of Harpoon Joint Common Test Set (JCTS) and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$82 million," the DSCA said in a press release.

The DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale today, the release said.

The Harpoon is an all-weather, over-the-horizon, anti-ship missile, developed and manufactured by McDonnell Douglas that uses active radar homing and flies just above the water to evade defenses.

The missile can be launched from fixed wing aircraft without a solid-fuel rocket booster, from surface ships when fitted with a solid-fuel rocket booster and from submarines when fitted with a solid-fuel rocket booster and encapsulated in a container to enable submerged launch through a torpedo tube, according to published reports.

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**Taliban Can Not Count on Int'l. Relief if Takes Control of Afghanistan By Force - Blinken**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The Taliban movement (banned in Russia) cannot count on a reprieve from the international community if it seizes control of Afghanistan by force, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

The Taliban has embarked on an offense since the US and other foreign troops began their pullout from Afghanistan this spring, with projections showing the terror group is on track to reclaim control of the country after the withdrawal is completed.

"The Taliban has repeatedly said that they seek... a number of things: international recognition, international support, they want their leaders to travel freely around the world, they would like sanctions lifted," Blinken said. "None of those things are going to be possible if the Taliban seeks to take the country by force."

The Secretary of State warned that any future Afghan leadership governing without regard for inclusivity and the reforms achieved throughout the past 20 years, since the US-led NATO mission began, will be treated as a 'pariah state' by Washington and in all likelihood its allies. Blinken condemned the reported atrocities committed by the Taliban where it is advancing as disturbing and unacceptable.

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**US-Russian Naval Cooperation in Arctic 'Adequate,' But More Can Be Done - Vice Admiral**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - There are many more areas the United States and Russia can target for collaboration for the greater good in the Arctic although current cooperation is at an adequate level, US Second Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Andrew Lewis, told Sputnik on the sidelines of the 2021 Sea-Air-Space Conference and Exposition on Monday.

"I think we have adequate cooperation, but there's areas we can cooperate more in which to be more respectful, but also for the greater good," Lewis said. "It's [current cooperation] acceptable, but I would have ambitions for more."

Lewis said a couple years ago while operating in the Baltics in and around Russian forces it was professional and there were never any problems or issues.

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**US Navy Would Welcome Opportunity to Engage With Russian Counterparts - Vice Admiral**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States Navy would welcome any chance to positively engage with its Russian military counterparts on a range of areas in the Arctic, US Second Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Andrew Lewis, told Sputnik on the sidelines of the 2021 Sea-Air-Space Conference and Exposition on Monday.

"We would welcome any opportunity to engage positively with our military counterparts," Lewis said when asked about US-Russia collaboration in the Arctic.

Areas of cooperation, Lewis added, could include exploration of oil and gas and precious metals, search and rescue and safety at sea, along with professional behavior. For example, he added, the professional and cooperative nature between Russia and Norway is the reason why that area has the most fertile fishing grounds in the world.

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**US Senator Graham Says Tested Positive for Coronavirus 'Even After Being Vaccinated'**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - US Senator Lindsey Graham said on Monday that he tested positive for the novel coronavirus despite having received a vaccine.

"I was just informed by the House physician I have tested positive for COVID-19 even after being vaccinated," Graham said via Twitter.

Graham said he started developing flu-like symptoms on Saturday and went to see a doctor earlier on Monday.

"I am very glad I was vaccinated because without vaccination I am certain I would not feel as well as I do now. My symptoms would be far worse," Graham said.

Graham said his symptoms are mild and he would quarantine for a period of ten days.

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**US Mission Suspended Across Russia Except in Moscow Over Hiring Ban - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US Embassy in Moscow will remain open but operations at other facilities in Russia remain suspended, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

Russia banned the US embassy from hiring locals and third-country nationals as part of a wave of tit-for-tat sanctions. The new rule went into effect on Sunday.

"Our Embassy in Moscow does remain open," Price told reporters. "When it does come to our other facilities, operations remain suspended at the US Consulate General in Vladivostok. All public facing services were halted earlier this year at our Consulate General Yekaterinburg."

Price said the US Embassy in Moscow was forced to lay off hundreds of employees across US diplomatic facilities in Russia, negatively impacting operations.



The US administration is evaluating what may be an appropriate potential response, Price added.

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US Expects Russian Diplomats to Leave Country to Apply for Visa Extension - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US government expects Russian diplomats in the United States whose visas have expired to leave the country and apply for an extension, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"When visas expire these individuals are expected to leave the country or apply for an extension," Price said while commenting on the US government's decision to ask more than 20 Russian diplomats to leave the United States by September 3 after their visas expired.

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US to Limit Carbon-Steel Pipe Imports From Russia, Ukraine, Korea – Trade Commission

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – The United States government is set to impose anti-dumping orders on imports of carbon-steel alloy pipes from Russia, South Korea and Ukraine, the US International Trade Commission (USITC) said on Monday.

"The USITC today determined that a US industry is materially injured by reason of imports of seamless carbon and alloy steel standard, line, and pressure pipes from Korea, Russia, and Ukraine that the Department of Commerce has determined are sold in the United States at less

than fair value and subsidized by the governments of Korea and Russia," the USITC said in a news release.

As a result of the Commission's determinations, the Commerce Department will issue anti-dumping duty orders on imports of these products from South Korea, Russia, and Ukraine and countervailing duty orders on imports of these products from South Korea and Russia, the release stated.

The ruling will cover seamless carbon and alloy steel (other than stainless steel) pipes and redraw hollows, less than or equal to 16 inches (406.4 mm) in nominal outside diameter, regardless of wall thickness, manufacturing process or end finish, the USITC said.

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#### **New US Refugee Program for Afghans Faces Considerable Challenges - Blinken**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - A new US refugee program for Afghans who are not eligible for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) to the United States will face considerable challenges ahead, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

Earlier in the day, the State Department said the US administration is widening eligibility for priority refugee admission for thousands more Afghans who worked with US forces but are not eligible for the Special Immigrant Visas.

"A great deal of hard work has gone into this already, but even more lies ahead," Blinken told reporters. "There's a significant diplomatic, logistical and bureaucratic challenge."

The United States is currently focused on relocating 1,000 Afghan SIV applicants and their families, totaling some 4,000 people, Blinken said.

A second flight carrying Afghan interpreters arrived in the United States on Monday morning; some 400 Afghans have arrived in the country since Friday, Blinken said.

Over the last several months, Afghans who served as interpreters and in other roles for US forces have faced increasing threats from the Taliban. The United States promised to get all Afghan allies out of Afghanistan before the US withdrawal is expected to be done by August 31.

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#### **UN Report Says 34% Food Served in West Asia Ends Up Wasted**

UNITED NATIONS, August 2 (Sputnik) - A new report by the UN Environment Program (UNEP) said on Monday that over a third of the food served in the West Asian region is wasted.

UNEP's findings are based on the analysis it conducted in 12 countries and territories of the region — Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

"Food waste in West Asia is alarming as it represents an estimated 34% of the total food served," the report said.

It explained that unique features of the region's culture create substantial challenges related to food waste.

For example, during annual religious festivals, such as Ramadan, 24% to 50% of food prepared, which also far exceeds families' needs, ends being discarded.

"Food wasted at an average wedding in Mecca, Saudi Arabia can be sufficient to feed 250 hungry people," the report said.

Such levels of food waste are harmful to the region's food security, given its limited natural resources and increased dependency on food imports, UNEP pointed out.

"The current situation in some countries in the region, including Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic, Palestine and Yemen, is aggravated by persistent instability and ongoing conflicts resulting in increased poverty rates," the report said. "Citizens of these countries in conflict can be offered better food security if the amount and mode of food wastage are appropriately documented and explained."

To mitigate the food waste, the report offers the region to adopt enhanced behavioral practices among providers and consumers and enhance intra-regional trade.

The report also suggests that the countries adopt national strategies consistent with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals to eliminate food loss and waste.

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US, Several European Foreign Affairs Committee Chairs Express Opposition to Nord Stream 2

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – Foreign affairs committee chairs of the US Senate and several European parliaments on Monday jointly expressed opposition to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project and called on NATO to strengthen deterrence against an alleged threat from Russia.

"We, the Chairs of Foreign Affairs Committees of our respective national parliaments, continue to oppose the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project and with regret note the recent decision of the United States and Germany on Nord Stream 2, which entails resuming completion of the pipeline," the joint statement said. "In the changing security environment in the region, we call for commitments from NATO to strengthen deterrence, especially on the Eastern Flank from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea."

The foreign affairs committee chairs from the US, UK, Poland, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ireland insist that any further agreements on Nord Stream 2 should include mandatory consultations across the transatlantic community based on the fundamental principle of countering alleged Russian aggression.

In July, Germany and the US struck a deal that implies the completion of the Nord Stream 2 twin pipeline without the threat of American sanctions. Among the conditions stipulated in the deal, Germany vowed to prevent Russia from "using energy as a weapon" and to use all possible leverage to prolong Russian gas transit through Ukraine. However, Kiev sees the



pipeline as a threat to its energy security. Currently, the pipeline is reported to be 99 percent completed.

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#### **Blinken Says Reports of Taliban Atrocities 'Disturbing,' Unacceptable**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – The United States condemns reports of atrocities committed by the Taliban terror group (banned in Russia) in areas where it is advancing as disturbing and unacceptable, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday. "We've seen the reports of atrocities being committed by the Taliban in various places where they are on the offensive and these reports are deeply disturbing totally unacceptable," Blinken told reporters.

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#### **Second Flight Carrying Nearly 200 Afghan Allies Arrives in US - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - A second flight carrying Afghan nationals who worked with US forces arrived in the US on Monday, US State Secretary Antony Blinken said, adding that two flights brought to the US around 400 people. "The first flight of Operation Allies Refuge arrived in the United States on Friday, the second flight arrived early this morning together transporting around 400 people. And those flights will continue," he said.

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#### **New York Authorities to 'Take Down' Gangs After 10 People Shot Over Weekend - Mayor**

NEW YORK, August 2 (Sputnik) - New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio on Monday announced plans to "take down" armed gangs to stem a surfeit of gun violence after ten people were shot in just one area in the Bronx district over the weekend. "Just last Saturday, we saw a painful example of ten people, ten people shot in the 115th Precinct," de Blasio said. "What is very troubling is that detectives are telling us already that it's gang-related. We know so much of the problem has to do with gangs in the Bronx. You're going to be hearing a lot more about gang takedowns as we need to get many violent individuals off the streets."

New York State last month declared a state of emergency against gun violence, with Governor Andrew Cuomo signing into law a bill that enables suing firearms makers for being a public nuisance.

More people died from shootings in New York than from COVID-19 over the Independence Day weekend on July 4, with 51 shooting fatalities compared to 13 deaths from the novel coronavirus.

Gun violence in New York has surged even as other crimes such as rape, robbery and larceny are at their lowest since at least 2015, data showed.

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#### US Senate Infrastructure Bill to Boost Revenue by Over \$51Bln - Taxation Committee

WASHINGTON, Aug 2 (Sputnik) - The US Senate's bipartisan bill on infrastructure could add just over \$51 billion to national coffers over the next decade, the Joint Committee on Taxation said in a research paper issued Monday.

Estimated revenue effects of the provisions from the infrastructure could add a total of \$51.06 billion to federal revenue, the committee, a nonpartisan research arm of the US Congress, said in the paper.

The bipartisan infrastructure plan eyes \$550 billion in new spending on the nation's physical infrastructure that includes \$110 billion for roads, bridges and major projects, \$39 billion for public transit and \$66 billion for railways.

It also calls for \$65 billion for broadband infrastructure deployment and \$55 billion for clean water investments. The proposal would be financed through unspent COVID-19 relief funds, targeted corporate user fees and strengthened tax enforcement regarding cryptocurrencies, according to the White House.

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#### UN Not Discussing Peacekeepers Deployment in Afghanistan Yet - Security Council President

UNITED NATIONS, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has not yet formally raised the issue of bringing a peacekeeping force into Afghanistan and is currently focusing on protecting its personnel working at the Assistance Mission (UNAMA) on the ground, Indian Ambassador to the world body T. S. Tirumurti said in a press briefing on Monday.

"I don't think the question of peacekeeping has been formally raised," Tirumurti said when asked whether any member of the UN Security Council had brought up the idea of deploying peacekeepers amid the US withdrawal from the country.

Tirumurti, who is presiding with the UN Security Council in August, said the main concern of the Secretary General and his deputy is the safety and security of the UN mission.

United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said earlier the United Nations is taking all measures it can to protect its staff in Afghanistan following the attack last week on the UN compound in Herat.

Dujarric also said that as the situation evolves, the United Nations is ready to take further necessary precautions.

Afghanistan is witnessing a spike in violence amid the gradual withdrawal of international troops from the country in accordance with the US-Taliban peace agreement concluded in Doha in February, 2020.

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**UN Security Council President Says He Hopes World Body to Issue Statement on Herat Attack**

UNITED NATIONS, August 2 (Sputnik) - India's Ambassador to the United Nations T. S. Tirumurti said on Monday he hoped the UN Security Council will issue a statement condemning the attack on the UN compound in Afghanistan's Herat.

"The penholders [Estonia and Norway]... attempted a draft, and they are discussing with other countries," Tirumurti, who presides with the UN Security Council in August, said. "I really wish the penholders can persuade all the countries to come on the same page and issue a statement."

Turumurti added he thinks it is extremely important at this juncture to pronounce terrorist attacks and other attacks are not acceptable.

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**Seventy Percent of Americans Received at Least 1 Coronavirus Vaccine Dose - White House**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States reached a milestone on Monday with 70 percent of adults having received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccines, White House COVID-19 Data Director Cyrus Shahpar said.

"Today we hit 70 percent of adults w[ith] at least one dose! +468K doses reported administered, incl. 320K newly vaccinated (vs. 257K last Monday)," Shahpar said in a tweet.

The seven-day average of newly vaccinated individuals is the highest it has been since the week of July 4, during which time there was a large vaccine advocacy campaign.

However, only 40 percent of Americans believe that the situation is getting better, according to the results of a Gallup poll released on Monday.

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#### Canada Contributes Nearly \$5Mln in Funding for Food Aid in Gaza, Jordan - United Nations

UNITED NATIONS, August 2 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government has committed nearly \$5 million in funding for the UN World Food Program (WFP) food assistance programs in the Gaza Strip and refugee sites in Jordan, the WFP said on Monday.

"WFP had already been forced to stop... assistance to 21,000 vulnerable refugees in July due to lack of funds and was concerned that further cuts to another 110,000 refugees are unavoidable in September. However, the Canadian Government stepped in with emergency funding of \$3.2 million to maintain this monthly assistance for another month," the UN agency said in a statement.

In addition, Canada contributed \$1.7 million towards food aid programs in Gaza - still reeling from the hostilities between Hamas and Israel earlier this spring - which is expected to support more than 64,000 people for the next two months, the WFP said in a separate statement. Canadian support comes amid increasing budget shortages at the WFP, according to the agency, which has been forced to cut aid to vulnerable populations in Jordanian refugee camps housing refugees displaced by the ongoing civil conflict in Syria.

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#### New York Mayor Suggests Return to Indoor Masking Against Coronavirus

NEW YORK, August 2 (Sputnik) - New York City establishments should return to indoor masking as a precaution against the novel coronavirus even if the patrons are fully vaccinated, Mayor Bill de Blasio said on Monday.

"We want to strongly recommend that people wear masks in indoor settings even if you're vaccinated," de Blasio said. "If you don't know the people around, if you're not sure if they're vaccinated or not, or if you know some are unvaccinated, it's absolutely crucial to wear a mask even if you are vaccinated."

De Blasio stopped short of mandating the use of masks in all indoor settings, despite other large US metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles and Washington having done so. Separately, New York City has already made masking mandatory in public transit, hospitals and schools. Nearly five million New Yorkers have received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccines, but the speed of inoculations has meanwhile slowed. Two million adult New Yorker residents are unvaccinated, according to city records.

De Blasio's call came as New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo suggested earlier that private businesses in the state ask customers for proof of vaccination as a condition for admission to ensure better safety and to safeguard their own commercial interest.

Cuomo said the daily number of infections in the state has increased by four-fold to more than 2,000 cases over the past month due to the more contagious Delta variant of the virus.

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#### Ex-Afghan Interpreter Says Risked Everything for US, Warns of Bleak Future in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Former Afghan interpreter Ismail Khan risked his life to help US special forces between 2006 and 2012, and although he now lives in the US state of Washington, he warns of a bleak future for Afghanistan, especially for Afghans who helped US forces but have not yet been evacuated as promised.

"I risked everything... My house was a safe zone for special forces, we planned a lot of meetings in my house, we talked to tribal leaders and did whatever we could to make sure they succeed," Khan told Sputnik. "I was really happy to do that, [but] I did not know the consequences at that time, what it would bring to my family."

Thousands of Afghans are trying to flee Afghanistan as the United States withdrawal nears completion and the military offensive of the Taliban movement (outlawed in Russia) to recapture the country intensifies.

"[Taliban] they're going after every single person [interpreter], they will show no mercy... This is something happening on the ground there, it's heartbreaking for those who stood with the US government at a time when they needed them the most, but now they are left behind," Khan said.

Last week, the first group of nearly 250 Afghans who worked for the US military and diplomatic missions in Afghanistan arrived at Fort Lee, Virginia, and will boost efforts to evacuate more this month.

Politico reported, citing a US official, that the State Department is planning to evacuate an additional 4,000 applicants for the special immigrant visa program and their family members later this month, which brings the overall total for the group up to 20,000 refugees. The Afghan interpreters are expected to be flown out from Kabul to third countries, the report said.

In addition, the US State Department said on Monday the United States is widening eligibility for priority refugee admission for thousands more Afghans who worked with US forces but are not eligible for the Special Immigrant Visas (SIV).

Over the last several months, Afghans who served as interpreters and in other roles for US forces have faced increasing threats from the Taliban. The United States promised to get all Afghan allies out of Afghanistan before the US withdrawal is expected to be done by August 31. Khan said he has many friends and family members who worked alongside US forces and are still waiting to be evacuated out of Afghanistan.

"One of my cousins, who worked for about ten years with the US special forces, in 2013 his son who was nine years old was kidnapped by the Taliban and they were asking for \$150,000 US dollars," Khan said. "They gave some money and work with the government and released the son. About four months ago they killed his older son. So these are the consequences [for] the support that they have for the US government, that's what they get waiting for a visa. [Taliban] they're going to kill every single one of them [interpreters] if they take over the country."

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley said about half of the 419 district centers in Afghanistan are under Taliban control, but not any of the 34 provincial capitals in the country.

"They [Taliban] do not have any interest [in peace]," Khan said. "They will never do peace. If they wanted to do peace, they would have done it a long time ago, but we have been hearing about these negotiations and talks for years. [Taliban] they are more violent every single day." US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Gen. Frank McKenzie disclosed last month that the United States has increased airstrikes against the Taliban in support of Afghan forces over the last several days and is prepared to continue strikes in the coming weeks if the Taliban continues its attacks.

Afghanistan will fall into further turmoil and become a safe haven for terrorists, including the Islamic State [banned in Russia], Khan predicts.

"ISIS is already there [in Afghanistan] and if the Taliban takes over it will be a safe haven for most of the terrorists. Afghanistan will be their safe zone," Khan said. "They will definitely go there and do their operations from Afghanistan. Whoever comes in their way, they will be killed." The United States has called on neighboring countries, such as Pakistan, to do more to bring stability to the region after a US exit, but Khan does not believe that is realistic.

"I wish Pakistan and other countries would stop interrupting in the peace process. People need to understand Taliban is just a name, these are the neighboring countries that they don't want stability and peace in Afghanistan," Khan said. "I don't think that the world needs to rely on neighboring countries."

Afghan First Vice President Amrullah Saleh has continuously accused Pakistan of facilitating the Taliban takeover attempt in Afghanistan.

"Afg[hanistan] is under a full scale invasion of Talib [Taliban] terrorists who have an organized backing and sponsorship in Pakistan," Saleh said via Twitter on Sunday. "It has to be tackled. Talibs use Doha office for deception. They have no intention to engage in meaningful negotiations."

Khan warns that the United States is withdrawing from Afghanistan at the wrong time and predicts US forces will find themselves in a similar situation like Iraq, when a withdrawal of US forces was followed by the emergence of the Islamic State terror group.

"If they [US] wanted to pull out, they should have done it in 2006, they should have done it in 2010, this is not the right time to do it and with that short period of time when the Taliban are on the rise and they are more violent," Khan said. "When they see that the US are out, they are pushing their operations, their attacks on the local population as well. So I don't think this is the right time."

US Defense Department said on Thursday in its quarterly report from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) that the Afghan government faces an existential crisis unless the military offensive by the Taliban movement is reversed.

The report said the absence of a major US troop presence will be consequential and create a greater challenge for the Afghan government in light of growing insurgent pressure.

Leaving Afghans behind during the rise of the Taliban "will definitely affect future cooperation," Khan said.

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#### All UN Security Council Members Deeply Concerned by Situation In Afghanistan - President

UNITED NATIONS, August 2 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council is deeply concerned about the situation in Afghanistan, Security Council's President for August, Indian Ambassador T. S. Tirumurti said in a press briefing on Monday.

"The situation in Afghanistan is of deep concern to all members of the Security Council," Tirumurti said.

The diplomat added that given the increase in civilian casualties over the recent weeks, and the last week's attack on the UN compound in Herat, the Security Council will be addressing the situation in Afghanistan "sooner rather than later."

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#### US, ACLU Renew Battle Over Policy Allowing Migrants to Be Turned Away at Southern Border

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department and the rights advocate American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have renewed a legal battle over the Biden administration's use of a Trump-era public health policy that allows asylum-seeking migrants to immediately be turned away at the US southern border, a court filing revealed on Monday.

"The parties' discussions attempting to resolve or narrow the dispute in this case have reached an impasse. The parties therefore seek to resume litigation on Plaintiffs' motions for class certification and classwide preliminary injunction," the Justice Department and ACLU said in a joint court filing.

The ACLU is trying to block the Title 42 policy, which authorizes US immigration enforcement to immediately "expel" migrants at the southern border due to concerns they may have the coronavirus. US officials recently said there are no changes to announce regarding the policy. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data shows that Border Patrol agents encountered 188,829 undocumented migrants on the US southern border in the month of June, bringing the total number of apprehensions in the region since October to 1.1 million. As of October, 751,844 migrants have been turned away at the US southern border under the Title 42 policy, according to CBP data.

The number of monthly apprehensions on the southern border for July is expected to surpass the June total as larger groups of migrants are arriving more frequently.

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#### UN on Belarusian Athlete Timanovskaya: No One Should Be Forced to Go Home Under Threat

UNITED NATIONS, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United Nations believes that no one should be forced to return to their countries under threat in light of the incident with Belarusian Olympic



sprinter Kristina Timanovskaya, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

"What is important is that everyone who asks for protection, for refugee status is afforded that opportunity," Dujarric said. "No one should be forced to go home under threat or under force." Dujarric also said everyone has a "fundamental right" to express their opinions freely without fearing harassment.

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#### US-Russia Cybersecurity Talks Could Be Broader Than Just Ransomware - Antonov

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Engagement between the US and Russia on cybersecurity issues could go beyond discussions of ransomware to include topics such as cyberthreats to arms control systems, Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said during an interview on Monday.

"American colleagues, however, prefer to focus discussions mainly on ransomware activities, while cybersecurity is much broader. I hope that this dialogue will acquire a comprehensive character in the near future. As an option, we can debate on cyber threats to arms control systems, etc," Antonov said.

The US and Russia have been engaging in cybersecurity dialogues with one another following the meeting between presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin in Geneva this June. Antonov called the dialogues an "important and promising sign" of progress in the area.

While the US has dealt with several large ransomware incidents on businesses including the Colonial Pipeline and Kaseya, Antonov said that Russia suffers equally from cybercriminals. He cited a recent attack against the healthcare system in the city of Voronezh as evidence.

Antonov added that although the Russian National Computer Incident Response and Coordination Center is ready to cooperate with the US on cybersecurity concerns, accusations of Russian links to hacking incidents "should be raised not by reporters, but professionals."

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#### PREVIEW - Boeing Starliner Set to Launch on Delayed Unmanned Cargo Mission to ISS on Tuesday

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – Boeing's Starliner spacecraft designed for manned flight will launch on its second test un-crewed cargo mission to the International Space Station (ISS) on Tuesday after a delay from last week over weather conditions, NASA announced.

"Starliner will launch on a United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket from Space Launch Complex-41 at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida," the agency said in a press

release. "The mission is targeted to launch at 1:20 pm EDT [Eastern Daylight Time] Tuesday, August 3."

About 30 minutes after launch, Starliner will perform its orbital insertion burn to begin its daylong trip to the space station, the agency said.

"The spacecraft is scheduled to dock [at] the space station at 1:37 pm [EDT] Wednesday, August 4," the release said.

The US space agency described the OFT-2 flight as "an important un-crewed mission designed to test the end-to-end capabilities of the new system for NASA's Commercial Crew Program." The spacecraft will carry more than 400 pounds of NASA cargo and crew supplies to the ISS, NASA said.

It will then return to Earth with more than 550 pounds of cargo, including reusable Nitrogen Oxygen Recharge System (NORS) tanks that provide breathable air to station crew members, the agency added.

"OFT-2 will demonstrate the end-to-end capabilities of the Starliner spacecraft and Atlas V rocket from launch to docking to a return to Earth in the desert of the western United States," the US space agency said in an earlier release.

The un-crewed mission will provide valuable data toward NASA certifying Boeing's crew transportation system for regular flights with astronauts to and from the ISS, the agency noted. The test launch was originally scheduled for last Friday but was delayed because of weather conditions in the area, the space agency acknowledged.

Starliner's previous and first un-crewed test mission was in December 2019, when it failed to dock with the ISS because of an orbit insertion anomaly.

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#### **New York Governor Suggests Private Business Admit Only Coronavirus Vaccinated Patrons**

NEW YORK, Aug 2 (Sputnik) - Private businesses in New York State should ask customers for proof of vaccination against the novel coronavirus as a condition for admission in order to ensure safety for all and to safeguard their own commercial interest, Governor Andrew Cuomo said on Monday.

"Private businesses, I am asking them and suggesting to them go to a vaccine-only admission," Cuomo told a media briefing. "If I go to a bar, and I want to have a drink and I want to talk to the person next to me, I want to know that person next to me is vaccinated. I believe it is in your business interest to run a vaccine-only establishment."

Cuomo's remarks came as the number of daily cases in New York increased by what he called "four-fold" to more than 2,000 over the past month due to the more contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus.

Nearly five million New Yorkers have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, but the speed of inoculations has slowed. Two million adult New Yorkers are still unvaccinated, according to city records.

Even before Cuomo's call, some businesses operating in New York City, the state's number one business hub, were already asking customers and their employees for proof of vaccination to minimize the spread of the virus. On Friday, Disney said it is requiring all salaried and non-union hourly employees in the United States to be fully vaccinated against the coronavirus by the end of September.

Cuomo cited Radio City Music Hall as another example of an establishment that did the same "months ago", saying it had reopened on a "vaccine-only (basis) and sold out all the shows" it put up.

Sports arenas also went up to 90 percent occupancy by asking patrons for proof of vaccination, he added.

Cuomo separately ordered employees of New York's Metropolitan Transport Authority and Port Authority - which operate the state's trains, buses and ferry services - to get vaccinated by Labor Day or face weekly testing. Last week, he made a similar order for state hospital employees.

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**US House Speaker Pelosi Urges Fellow Democrats to Support Extension of Eviction Moratorium**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in a letter to her fellow Democrats in the US Senate on Monday has asked to support the extension of the eviction moratorium that expired on Saturday.

"It is unfathomable that we would not act to prevent people from being evicted. Overwhelmingly, our Members agreed to extend the moratorium and universally, to distribute the funds. But the House passing the eviction moratorium without the Senate acting does not extend the moratorium. Instead, the money must flow, and the moratorium must be extended by the Administration," Pelosi said in the letter.

Pelosi underscored that the whole point of the extension is to provide more time for the distribution of the unspent \$46.5 billion allocated by the US Congress to cover the needs of those who face evictions.

On Thursday, US President Joe Biden asked Congress to extend the moratorium on evictions that was put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, saying many renters still faced financial difficulties and those driven from their homes could face a heightened risk of infection.

A nationwide moratorium on evictions for non-payment of rent instituted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been in place for nearly 11 months, since September 2020, and was slated to expire on June 30, however, the deadline was extended till July 31.

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**IOM Says 1,111 Migrants Rescued Off Libyan Coast During Last Week of July**

\*UNITED NATIONS, August 2 (Sputnik) - The last week of July saw some 1,111 migrants being rescued in the Central Mediterranean and returned to Libya, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said in a statement on Monday.

"In the period of 25-31 July, 1,111 migrants were rescued [or] intercepted at sea and returned to Libya," IOM said via Twitter.

In 2021, a total of 19,393 refugees have been returned to Libya so far, compared to a significantly lower number of 11,891 of those who were intercepted at sea throughout last year, the IOM added.

At least 360 migrants have died this year while trying to cross the sea route to Europe, while 570 remain missing. In 2020, some 381 people lost their lives on the Central Mediterranean, and 597 more were reported missing, according to the IOM.

The Central Mediterranean route between Libya and Italy is the deadliest one for migrants attempting to reach Europe. Last week, at least 57 migrants died and 18 migrants were rescued after a boat capsized off the Libyan coast.

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**Afghans Must Relocate on Their Own to Other States to Apply for US Visa - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - Afghans who assisted the US forces during their presence in Afghanistan are responsible themselves to relocate to third countries before they can be processed for a special immigrant visa (SIV) to the United States, a senior US State Department official said on Monday.

"It is the responsibility of the applicant to get themselves out of Afghanistan," the official said during a telephone press briefing. "We have to wait until they are outside of the country in order to begin processing."

The official noted that cases, referred to the Refugee Admissions Program, will be processed in third countries once the applicants are outside of Afghanistan.

The processing will be a lengthy given that the security screening alone will take between 12 and 14 months, the official added.

Thousands of people are trying to flee Afghanistan following the nearly full US troop withdrawal and the offensive of the Taliban movement (outlawed in Russia) to recapture the country. In July, US President Joe Biden announced the relocation flights from Afghanistan for interpreters and other allies were set to begin in July.

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**No Major Outflow of Refugees from Afghanistan Detected – US State Dept.**



WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) – There has been no major outflow of people from Afghanistan while some people are crossing the border to neighboring countries amid the ongoing Taliban (banned in Russia) offense, a senior US State Department official said on Monday.

"We have not seen major large outflows of people yet, but we have seen some numbers of people crossing but not large numbers yet," the official at a telephone press briefing. The official also said that the US has held discussions with countries neighboring Afghanistan and with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees about future outflows of people from the country.

Thousands of Afghans are trying to flee their country following the nearly full US troops withdrawal and the offensive of the Taliban movement (outlawed in Russia) to recapture the country. In July, US President Joe Biden announced the relocation flights from Afghanistan for interpreters and other allies were set to begin in July.

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US Calls for Taliban to Be Held Accountable for 'War Crimes' in Kandahar- Embassy in Kabul

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is calling for the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) to be held accountable for war crimes in Kandahar, the US embassy in Kabul said on Monday.

"In Spin Boldak, Kandahar, the Taliban massacred dozens of civilians in revenge killings. These murders could constitute war crimes; they must be investigated and those Taliban fighters or commanders responsible held accountable... The Taliban's leadership must be held responsible for the crimes of their fighters. If you cannot control your fighters now, you have no business in governance later," the US embassy said via Twitter.

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US to Widen Refugee Eligibility for Afghan's Who Worked With Forces

WASHINGTON, August 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is widening eligibility for priority refugee admission for thousands more Afghans who worked with US forces but are not eligible for the Special Immigrant Visas (SIV), the US State Department said on Monday.

"Today, the Department of State is announcing a Priority 2 (P-2) designation granting U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) access for certain Afghan nationals and their eligible family members," the statement said.

This designation allows the resettlement "many thousands of Afghans and their immediate family members", according to the state department.

This program is designed for Afghans who worked with US and NATO institutions not as interpreters and aides, as is provided for in SIV, the statement explained.

Last week, the first group of nearly 250 Afghans who worked for the US military and diplomatic missions in Afghanistan arrived in the US.

Thousands of Afghans are trying to flee their country following the nearly full US troops withdrawal and the offensive of the Taliban movement (outlawed in Russia) to recapture the country. Earlier in July, US President Joe Biden announced the relocation flights from Afghanistan for interpreters and other allies will begin this month.